

The role of email marketing in the multi-channel evolution: Part 1

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Email is still the most cost-effective marketing tool, enabling you to reach people who have actually given you permission to communicate with them and who are therefore more likely to pay attention to your message and respond to your calls-to-action.

The medium allows brands to send messages according to their own schedule and it allows consumers to respond at their leisure, while permitting a high degree of personalisation that gives you the capability to adapt campaigns to the individual needs of every recipient.

Within the past 10 years, email has become a top revenue generator for many companies, and even with the meteoric rise of other media email remains at the heart of all online applications and will remain there for the foreseeable future.

But, even so, times are changing...

New technologies such as smartphones and social media have emerged that are busy disrupting email's traditional communication dominance and fragmenting audiences

With that said: each channel has its own natural strengths and has been growing and advancing accordingly.

Mobile, for example, is an action-oriented medium where consumers are thought of as moving targets. The opportunity to engage consumers in a contextual, interactive manner based on knowledge of both time and location is unrivaled in any other medium in terms of delivering the most relevant messages.

There are 7 billion people on the planet. 5.1 billion of them own a cell phone and in some countries there are more mobile subscriptions than there are people. Thanks to the instantcy of mobile, it takes only about 90 seconds for the average person to respond to an SMS. And due to the fact that one's mobile device is always carried, always on and always connected, mobile coupons can easily achieve 10 times the redemption rate of traditional coupons.

It's no surprise then that 2012 has seen a boom in global mobile marketing efforts.

Taking a closer look at social media figures - today, one in every nine people on earth is a Facebook user and Twitter sees an average of 190 million tweets per day. This is according to one study published in September 2011, aptly titled "Stunning Social Media Statistics".

Besides these impressive numbers, social media has shown a powerful ability to engage customers - right behind email. A 2011 Customer Engagement Report by digital marketing research group, Insight Express, shows that 72% of marketers surveyed cite email newsletters as most likely to result in a tangible improvement to customer engagement, 48% cite presence on social networks like Facebook and 46% cite micro-blogging sites like Twitter.

Mobile and social make good bedfellows

The growth of the social networks over the last few years has been matched by the mobile internet; with smartphone sales approaching nearly 500 million units in 2011, with more than 10.9 billion app downloads happening within the past three years and with 50% of all page views on mobile phones in 2011 accounted for by social networks.

Tactics for success in social are very different from those in email. But email and social are alike in a very significant way: they are two prominent permission-based channels. Marketers who are good at email head into social with a competitive advantage - since they already understand the principles of audience acquisition, relevance and engagement.

These facts highlight both the staying power of email and the rise of social media and mobile use. The key now is how to pull them together to create effective cross-channel marketing.

Even so, you may still be wondering why a company that has built its communications program on alone email should move its messages onto social and mobile channels.

The research encouraging cross-channel marketing does speak for itself, but disregarding all the figures temporarily, just ask yourself the following question: is everyone you want to reach already on your email list? And if they are, are you able to provide them with relevant and dynamic communications 100% of the time?

The reality is that if you're not in contact with your customers via email as well as through social and mobile channels; you're probably not reaching your audience with contextual messages right where they live, work and play. And therefore, very likely losing out on valuable business opportunities.

When you isolate yourself to one direct digital channel - money slips through your fingers. This in itself is reason enough for anyone to consider marrying other platforms into their marketing mix.

In the next part of this four-article series I discuss some opportunities around the convergence of email with social and mobile, giving you insights and practical tips on how to integrate and manage your cross-channel voice and leverage these tools, in unison, to get better results.

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